



***“O’odham haicu hu:g’o wud si ha’icu, Ba:wi ‘o t-gewkdag”***  
**O’odham traditional foods are sacred, Tepary Beans are our strength”**  
**Food Sovereignty Conference**

**January 17-18, 2020, Comobabi Community, Tohono O’odham Nation**  
*Hosted by the Comobabi Community of the Schuk Toak District, Tohono O’odham Nation, and the International Indian Treaty Council*

*Ba:wi. Hu:n. Ha:l, Ciolim and many other O’odham Ha’icu Hu:g are gifts to a:cim O’odham.*

## **Recommendations as a basis for ongoing and future work for O’odham Ha-Jewedga**

*“Ba:wi (Tepary Beans), are one of the most ancient and magical beans to be passed down through generations of Indigenous Peoples from South to North America. The properties of these tiny beings cannot be expressed enough for their drought tolerance, low glycemic index and delicious flavor.*

*For a:cim Tohono O’odhm. Ba:wi and the stories of how Ba:wi came to the people span back thousands of years, and are considered as the stars in the sky. Specifically, there are stories of the Tomag (Milky Way), which is a trail of Ba:wi made by a man who travels across the sky with a hole in his bag made by Ban (coyote). In the summertime, Ba:wi is planted when the first monsoon rains saturate the ground so that the first drink that the beans take are rain water that was prayed for. This rainwater is the breast milk of Jewed K;cim, and is important for DNA structure of the bean as well as its overall integrity and character. Growing these beans is a ceremony within itself, because if grown traditionally and within the monsoon season, it is truly and act of faith and trust in the elements, earth and O’odham, working together. We are told that if the beans are grown with tap water and watered often, they grow up to be spoiled and don’t produce as much.”*

*“We remember that part of our stories are that Creator gave us this plants for us to use and grow and it is part of maintaining the balance”*

We gather here, strengthening the stories and foundations of our foods, bringing healing for the next generations, educating ourselves about the many aspects of our precious foods and being

empowered to take ownership of our stories, ways of growing and to continue sustaining our Apedag (Health/Wellness) and Himdag (Way of Life).

We are thankful to our Kekelbad and Kekel Hemajkam who kept our original practices, knowledge, stories, ceremonies and languages alive, for all the Oidagkam and hemajkam that continue these ways, who are the reason why we can gather and enjoy the richness of our foods and stories. We are thankful for our ancestors and elders who took care of these foods for us to enjoy for generations to come.

We understand that this is an ongoing conversation and commit to continuing this process of gathering information to take this working document into a declaration that can be adopted by the Tohono O'odham Nation per the process of community and district councils.

**We recognize** the importance of shining light on our traditional foods, for the sake of generational knowledge and safekeeping by Wecij Hemajkam/Youth. We are fortunate that our grandmothers and grandfathers grew our foods and we commit to continue remembering how our ancestors grew our foods sustainably. We commit to continue working with the elders to protect the knowledge that they hold and care for them in that regard.

**We recognize** that climate change will affect food sources in the near future. Drought is coming, which is why it is so important to take care of Ba:wi, because they are drought resistant. We see the obligation to prepare for adaptation and commit to continue gathering and implementing the Climate change adaptation plan in our communities.

**We understand** the importance to be water sovereign; we have to be sovereign with our water and are committed to protect our water in our future. We commit to not relying on anybody for our water.

**We recognize** that many young farmers did not grow up growing our foods but the young farmers are committed to continue being farmers and caretakers of the foods. Those growing up with farming also commit to continue learning and growing and passing the knowledge they have.

**We commit** to overcoming the challenges that come with continuing our ways of life including our harvests being disrupted or destroyed by weather events. We recognize the sacrifice and tradition that goes into caretaking for these foods and will do our best to ensure that no resource is wasted in the process of growing our foods.

**We understand** the importance of seed saving and being seed sovereign. We commit to being seed sovereign and bringing those relatives/seeds home that have been far away by working with organizations and individuals who have our seeds, and assert our right to re-matriation/the return of our seeds to their homelands where they can be grown in accordance with our teachings and values.

**We understand** the importance of having more gatherings that bring attention to our traditional foods. We are thankful that we gathered as community members and shared our knowledge that is necessary to be kept on. We understand that values and traditions are rooted in family and community, and continue to support growth and passing of knowledge in these circles before anything else.

**We recognize** that it is our sacred responsibility to continue caretaking for the Ba:wi and our O'odham Ha'icu Hu:g. We will continue telling the Creation story and other stories to our children, and living according to our original instructions. As Indigenous Peoples, our songs, stories, dances, languages and ceremonies connect us directly to our traditional foods, Je'e Jewed (Mother Earth), Dam Ka:cim (Sky), ju:ki (rain) and we:s ha'icu doakud (all living things).

**We recognize** that Food Sovereignty is our right, based on rights recognized in the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, other International Standards as well as our Nation to Nation Treaties. It is also the basis for unity, and for bringing us together as Peoples.

**We understand** the trauma from colonization and that we need to restore the balance through restoring our lands, waters, traditional learning and teaching systems, original foods, languages, medicinal plants and animals, sacred places, and the health and well-being of our families. We also attest to representing and advocating for truth telling and positive representation when and where O'odham foods are being sold, served, shared, and being taught about.

**We commit** to do the same for our young people and coming generations. We will teach them to honor the farmers, knowledge holders and food producers, and encourage them to work and learn along-side them so that these ways can continue into the future. We also recognize the vital contributions of the youth of our Nations to this effort, which cannot be achieved without their full and active participation.

**We intend** based on Article 31 of the UN Declaration to bring our seed relatives home and to continue the discussion of seed repatriation/repatriation and to talk to seed repositories who have our seeds. Seed sovereignty is necessary for us to be sovereign. We commit to doing the work to build partnerships and relationships that honor our seed relatives and ancestors. We commit to being ready to bring these relatives home and taking care of them.

**We stand** in solidarity with one another in our work to restore, strengthen and defend our food sovereignty, and will continue to gather together to build our mutual support and understanding, and share our strategies and knowledge with other communities and tribes.

**We intend** to initiate the process to declare the Tohono O'odham Nation traditional homelands and territory to be a Food Sovereignty zone. We proclaim that farmers cease and desist utilizing

genetically modified seeds, toxic pesticides and other chemicals that cause environmental contamination, as well as the introduction of invasive species and other harmful practices to O’odham lands and food.. In this way, the Tohono O’odham Nation will be a healthy and safe place for our traditional plants, and our children, grandchildren and future generations to live, survive and thrive in good health, peace and strength.

**We recognize** that the process to restore our Food Sovereignty must begin immediately, and it must be done by us. We commit to take collective action to implement this Declaration, to defend our rights and our Peoples, and to build the necessary understanding among our Nations, leaders and policy-makers on all levels, as well as our youth and coming generations, to make it a continuing reality.

We commit to taking this statement to the Comobabi Community, Schuk Toak District and Tohono O’odham Nation Legislative Council to be adopted.



**Adopted by consensus by the participants coming from over 10 Indigenous tribes/communities on January 18, 2020, Comobabi Community within the Schuk Toak District of the Tohono O’odham Nation**

---

*The International Indian Treaty Council and the O’odham Ha’cu Hu:g ‘o wud si has ha’icu, Ba:wi ‘o wud t-gewkdag Conference participants sincerely thank the Agro-Ecology Fund, the Lush Charity Pot, and all the contributors, presenters, participants, volunteers and community members for their generous contributions to this gathering.*